



**CONTROVERSIAL DECISION** — President Obama's executive action to change immigration policy, which includes a plan to protect an estimated five million undocumented immigrants from deportation, was revealed in prime time Nov. 20.

## Executive action taken Obama's immigration decision called 'unwise'

**WASHINGTON (BP)** — President Obama's new executive actions to change immigration policy imperil the growing, widespread agreement on reform, said the Southern Baptist Convention's lead ethicist.

Obama announced in prime time Nov. 20 his orders, which include most con-

troversially a plan to protect an estimated five million undocumented immigrants from deportation. The president's actions came after years of his own contentions that he did not have the legal authority to make or ignore immigration law. He chose to act at this time after a comprehensive

reform bill approved by the Senate in 2013 failed to gain a vote in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, Obama said.

The president's decision to act on his own is an "unwise and counterproductive move," said Russell D. Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

A backer of immigration reform, Moore said in an online post for Time magazine it is

see IMMIGRATION on p. 9

## Trustees: IMB's Platt unfolds five-point strategy

**OLIVE BRANCH, Miss. (BP)** — IMB President David Platt outlined his five-point strategic plan while presiding over his first trustee meeting as head of the mission agency. In a plan based on five biblical goals which have led to four practical steps and three initial recommendations, Platt offered two important reminders to reach one all-consuming goal: glorifying God.

Platt's five biblically based goals for IMB are: exalting Christ, mobilizing Christians, equipping the church, facilitating church planting and "playing our part in completing the Great Commission," he explained to trustees during Nov. 6-7 meetings in Olive Branch, Mississippi.

"Missions is not our life. Christ is our life," Platt said. "I want to lead us to love Him, to enjoy Him ... and to exalt Him among all peoples."

After serving IMB as executive vice president for the past decade, Clyde Meador is transitioning to executive advisor. In his new role, Meador will give insights from his wealth of knowledge and experience to new IMB leadership.

These desires led Platt to identify four practical steps to lead the organization, including shaping culture, streamlining strategy,

see STRATEGY on p. 10



**GLORIFYING GOD** — IMB president David Platt unfolds his five-point progressive strategy in a meeting with IMB trustees Nov. 6-7 in Olive Branch, Miss. (IMB Photo by Paul W. Lee)

## First Person: Give thanks for special people along the way

**ALABASTER, Ala. (BP)** — I remember my boyhood pastor saying that Christmas always had a tinge of sadness since it was the time his father died. Little did I realize for Donna and me the same kind of memories would materialize around both Thanksgiving and Christmas.

It was Thanksgiving 1992 and we sat at the table with my in-laws in Birmingham, Ala. My father-in-law, Robert Bell, always a good-humored man, joked that afternoon about getting older. He'd been forgetting things and laughed that he'd missed his cup while trying to pour coffee a few days before.

A few weeks later the medical tests came back and revealed a brain tumor. He died that summer.

The next Thanksgiving, my mother talked about her medical ailments. She hadn't felt well for some time. Still not feeling well at Christmas, she had to go lie down in the middle of our dinner. My wife and sister-in-law insisted on taking her to the emergency room.

The doctor found a spot in her lungs and suggested she go to a larger hospital as soon as possible. The doctors at St. Vincent's in Birmingham found that cancer had started in her right kidney, had traveled to her lungs and possibly to her brain. She died in only seven weeks.

So, this Thanksgiving, while we enjoy family and friends, many of us think about those who won't be there. But in our prayers, we can be grateful that God loaned us some special people along the way and enriched our lives through them.

As the apostle Paul wrote to his Philippian friends, "Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God" (Philippians 1:3, The Message Bible).

Michael Brooks is pastor of the Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster, Ala., and adjunct instructor of speech at Jefferson State Community College in Hoover.



**BROOKS**

Inside	372
Direction	
Sunday School	
Lessons	
Editorial	
Bibliography	
How to Be	
a Christian	10
Just for the Record	6, 7
Classifieds	9



## associate From the editor

TONY MARTIN

### These Challenging Days

Those of us who are baby boomers are living in, uh, interesting days. Bob Dylan nailed it when, decades ago, he wrote "the times, they are a-changin'." We of a certain age were alive when Sputnik was launched, and when man walked on the moon; we remember where we were when Kennedy was assassinated; and in later years, we remember Viet Nam, Nixon's resignation after Watergate, the Berlin Wall coming down... we may even remember Woodstock and the 60's. Those were days of extraordinary social and political upheaval. We see the world differently because of those days.

Now we are in a period of social change that I believe, subjectively, dwarfs what went on in previous decades. It seems that what was once good is now evil; what was virtuous is now a lie; and what were once the moral pillars of our society are crumbling. It seems that change is upon us daily, and it is not change for the better. It seems we're balanced on a knife's edge — one haphazard move and we slip off into the Abyss as a country.

As believers, we watch centuries of the best of biblical scholarship and Christian orthodoxy become twisted to fit unholy agendas. We see double standards at work in the media, where Christians are maligned but other religious groups are accommodated and embraced in the name of political correctness.

My response to all this is a profound sense of loss. Sometimes I think about the plight of Native Americans in our country when the Europeans came. I'm not going to debate the why's of their often terrible treatment — what's done is done. But consider: here are these indigenous people, living their lives without intrusion, when others come and stake claims on their lands. Before long, wars break out. The mindset among many newcomers toward the Indians was "We're more enlightened, more educated, more cultured than you are. We know what's best for you. And through the reach of our government, we are going to see to it that you comply with our laws and mandates. Cooperate, and all will go well for you. If you choose not to cooperate, there will be penalties." These newcomers were persuaded they were on the right side of history.

This may be a tortured analogy, and certainly it would be naive to compare what American Christians are facing these days to what American Indians were subjected to. But I think about those native peoples who had their lives turned upside down. I'm sure they felt extraordinary loss because their way of life had been wrested from them. It appears that American Christians are losing their way of life too — not in dramatic ways (we aren't being persecuted as other believers in the Middle East are, for instance), but in the most subtle and subversive of ways. We're being told "We're more enlightened, more educated, more cultured than you are. We know what's best for you. And through the reach of our government, we are going to see to it that you comply with our laws and mandates. Cooperate, and all will go well for you. If you choose not to cooperate, there will be penalties." There are many in government and in society who feel they're on the right side of history, too.

However, think about this: for the Christian, this is as bad as it will ever get. But for the non-believer, this is as good as it's ever going to be.

I'm not advocating retiring from humanity, climbing a mountain, and waiting in solitude for the End of Days. I would suggest, though, that we be mindful of the truth that this is not our home. We are pilgrims here. Exiles. We are, by birthright, out of step and out of synch with the culture. If we conform to the changes around us, then we can't be salt and light to the culture. At the same time, if we don't engage the culture, then the salt remains in the shaker and the light stays under a basket. We have to adapt as missionaries, but we also have to confront wickedness.

The challenge is plain. The world won't love us for the stand we take. We have to embrace the biblical combination of conviction in God's truth and compassion for His creation. We don't do that by standing off at a distance and hollering. We love others, even those who hold views contrary to ours and might even want us silenced. We see the world as perverse, abnormal, and destructive — and we must be willing to lay down our lives in love for those who are citizens of that world. Christ Himself personified this. His example is our call.

## Should churches have stand-and-greet times?

I conducted a Twitter poll (not scientific, I assure you) asking first-time church guests what factors made them decide not to return. In listing the top 10 in order of frequency (<http://thomrainer.com/2014/11/01/top-ten-ways-churches-drive-away-first-time-guests>), I was surprised that the number one issue guests don't like is a time to stand and greet one another.

So what is it about a stand-and-greet time that many guests don't like?

Here are several of the most common — although, again, unscientific — responses, listed in order of frequency.

■ **Many guests are introverts.** "I would rather have a root canal than be subjected to a stand and greet time."

■ **Some guests perceive the members are not sincere during the time of greeting.** "In most of the churches it should be called a stand and fake it time. The members weren't friendly at all except for ninety seconds."

■ **Many guests don't like the lack of hygiene that takes place during this time.** "Look, I'm not a germaphobe, but that guy wiped his nose right before he shook my hand."

■ **Many times the members only greet other members.** "I went to one church where no one spoke to me the entire time of greeting. I could tell they were speaking to people they already knew."

■ **Both members and guests at some churches perceive the entire exercise as awkward.** "Nowhere except churches do we have times that are so awkward and artificial. If members are going to be friendly, they would be friendly at other times as well. They're not."



### Guest opinion

with Thom S. Rainer

#### On the web

For a complete list of the top 10 factors first-time church guests decide not to return, visit <http://thomrainer.com/2014/11/01/top-ten-ways-churches-drive-away-first-time-guests>

■ **In some churches, the people in the congregation are told to say something silly to one another.** "So the pastor told us to tell someone near us that they are good looking. I couldn't find anyone who fit that description, so I left and didn't go back."

■ **Not only do some guests dread the stand and greet time, so do some members.** "I visited the church and went through the ritual of standing and greeting, but many of the members looked just as uncomfortable as I was. We were all doing a required activity that none of us liked."

There are strong comments at the post on both sides of the issue of whether a stand-and-greet time is helpful in reaching guests — enough to prompt churches to ask themselves whether it's effective in their community.

Thom S. Rainer is president of LifeWay Christian Resources and blogs at [ThomRainer.com](http://ThomRainer.com).

## THE BaptistRecord

**Editor**  
William H. Perkins Jr.  
[wperkins@mbcb.org](mailto:wperkins@mbcb.org)

**Associate Editor**  
Tony Martin  
[tmartin@mbcb.org](mailto:tmartin@mbcb.org)

**Layout/Design**  
Megan Young  
[myoung@mbcb.org](mailto:myoung@mbcb.org)

**Advertising**  
Emily Jones  
[ejones@mbcb.org](mailto:ejones@mbcb.org)

**Circulation Manager**  
Brenda Quattlebaum  
[bquattlebaum@mbcb.org](mailto:bquattlebaum@mbcb.org)

**Editor Emeritus**  
Don McGregor

**Baptist Record Advisory Committee:**  
Dwayne Parker, Flora Paul Sims, Pontotoc; Barry Burris, Terry Carl Whitte, Meridian; Billie Buckley, Petal; Russell Mord, Stangis

**Postmaster:**  
Send changes of address to: The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

**Send news, communication, and address changes to:** The Editor, Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.  
**Tel:** (601) 968-3800  
**Fax:** (601) 282-3330  
**E-mail:** [baptistrecord@mbcb.org](mailto:baptistrecord@mbcb.org)

### BAPTISTS

VOLUME 136 • NUMBER 47 • ISSN-0005-5778

Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$10.35 per year payable in advance. Economy plans available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.



# Hardened marine 'rocked' by loss, surrenders to Christ

**FLOWER MOUND, Texas (BP)** — As a drill instructor, Brandon Graham barked orders, broke recruits and turned out battle-ready Marines. He was fierce, tough and fearless, with crass language and harsh treatment all part of the package.

That all began to change, though, when driving to work one day Graham had what he calls a "Damascus Road experience" that left him weeping on the side of the highway.

The journey there, however, began long before he got in the car that morning. Graham, a 34-year-old Oklahoma native who now serves as assistant pastor at Rock-Pointe Church in Flower Mound, said news that he and his wife would become parents is what first pointed their lives in a new direction.

"My wife and I began going to church before our first child was born in an effort to 'clean ourselves up,' as if going to church would make us better parents," Graham said. "It was while attending church in San Diego that God began to work on me.... The Scripture was coming alive for the first time in my life."

Shortly after their return to church, the Grahams received devastating news. Brandon's close friend, Marine Sgt. Mark Adams, had been killed in action in Fajujah, Iraq.

"His death rocked me to the core," Graham said. "For the first time in my 25 years of existence, I realized I was mortal. The Marines train the fear of death out of you. A Marine infantryman is taught, 'We don't die; we just go to hell to regroup for a counter-attack.' Death was never an option."

God used Adams' death as well as the unshakable faith of Adams' parents in the wake of the tragedy to get Graham's attention.

"I began to wonder what else there was in this life, other than doing 20 years, getting out and getting another job somewhere. I really started to search. There had to be more out there than just this."

For Graham — the man accustomed to harsh language, loud orders and the thunder of a .50-caliber machine gun — a still, small voice deep in his spirit on his daily commute provided the answer to his search and a new mission.

"I was driving to work on California State



**BRANDON GRAHAM**

Highway 163 in San Diego," Graham said. "I heard God speak to me in a way I'd never heard before. I won't use the word 'audible.' I didn't hear it out loud but in my spirit. It was one of those things that was not of me. 'It's time,' it said."

"I just broke down. It was such a humbling experience because I knew what 'It's time' meant. God broke my spirit right there and called me to salvation. I prayed to receive Christ right there. I just said, 'I don't know what you have for me. I don't know what you want me to do, but I'm going to follow you.'"

Graham initially argued with God. With a young family, this was not the best time to leave the Marine Corps. And for a few moments, he resisted.

"I was overwhelmed, but I couldn't not follow him," Graham said. "I said, 'God, whatever you call me to do, I'll do it. I'm yours. I surrender my life to you, and whatever you say, I'll do.' That's what I consider my moment of conversion."

That evening, some six hours after his roadside encounter, Graham received a

tearful phone call from his wife Crystal, who had just completed a devotional.

"We need to talk," Crystal said.

Brandon imagined the worst: a divorce, trouble with one of their kids, something dire. But the Graham family had new orders.

"I just finished a Bible study, and the Holy Spirit clearly told me you're supposed to go into the ministry," Crystal said, with no idea of what had happened six hours earlier. For all she knew, Brandon said, he was still a "reprobate."

He recounted the roadside testimony, and together they wept.

Graham completed his military commitment but not before his fellow Marines noticed a transformation.

"All of a sudden I started carrying my Bible. I was reading it in my duty hut. Other [drill instructors] were going out to party, but my desire was to be home with my family," Graham said.

"I really started to transform from the inside out. The old was truly dying away. I'd like to say my language got perfect over-

night. It didn't. But people could see a distinct difference right away."

That change led Graham to help a back-slidden fellow drill instructor return to faith. Graham was also able to come alongside another believer in Company E as a source of encouragement.

The change was obvious not only to new drill instructors and recruits but to a Marine in combat half a world away.

"I made sure I treated my guys with the utmost respect. I made sure they got plenty to eat, plenty of sleep. It's very rare. But part of it was because of the mercy and grace extended to me by Christ," Graham said.

When dealing with new recruits, Graham would share Heb. 12:11: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (NIV)

Graham had signed a recruit's Bible and included that verse. Later, he received an email from the recruit, now home from battle.

"While he was at war, when things got tough, he kept going back to that verse. And he knew he was going to be OK," Graham said.

Years removed from Graham's roadside conversion, when he argued with God about the cost of discipleship, he's OK, too.

According to senior pastor Ron Holton, Graham, who is also studying for an advanced master of divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, fills a utility role at Rock-Pointe. Graham's tireless work ethic and sterling integrity have made an impression on the pastor.

"There's not a specific thing that he does," Holton said. "But he is just so talented. He has the confidence that if you were looking for an example of a person that said, 'God, just use me, and I'll do whatever' — that's Brandon. Brandon's not afraid to try."

These days, Graham's mission is simple.

"The older I get and as each day goes by, I really focus on making each day count and making each day purposeful, so at the end of 70, 80 years or however many God has for me, I'm not looking back and wishing I'd done something different."

## Rappin' grandma had missions heart

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — Remembered by many for her tough-talking, missions-focused rappin' grandma character in numerous promotional videos for the International Mission Board, those who worked closely with Eloise Dieker also recall her servant heart.

Dieker, an IMB staff member for 44 years, died Nov. 11 at age 87. During her stint with the video segment "Words from Eloise" in the late '90s to mid-2000s, Dieker's character was part of "The Task" video series that promoted missions among thousands of high school and college students.

During a chapel service Nov. 12, Clyde Meador, IMB's executive adviser to the president, said Dieker "always looked for new challenges even agreeing to be part of a video series that made

her into a celebrity. Eloise always rose to the task."

Among the one- to three-minute segments, her character — with the help of much editing and a few stunt doubles — was filmed hang gliding, dunking a basketball, riding the rapids in a kayak, lifting weights on a bench press and jumping on a boardroom table to fire Donald Trump during a spoof of "The Apprentice" TV show. All of it was used as a tool to help point a younger audience to a Christ-filled life and missions involvement. The segments also promoted giving through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

"Time is a comin' so don't be buggin', so Co-op with the Program. Ya dig?" she said in a segment about the Cooperative Program funding channel central to Southern Baptist missions and

ministries. "The cheddar you drop in the plate can help more hear about J.C. So clean it up, fly right before J.C. is in the house! Give J.C. a dollar or I'll give you a holler."

In another segment she said, "Yield to God's plan. Come share Christ in a foreign land. Because when it's all said and done we're gonna be hangin' with the G-man and singin' praises to the Son."

David LaMar, a former senior video producer with IMB, pitched the idea of doing the segments to Dieker and fondly recalled working with her on nearly all of the video shoots.

"I've been directing music videos and doing videos my entire career and that is probably the one thing that people go, 'What? You did Words from Eloise? That is so cool!'" said LaMar, who continues to freelance for IMB.



**ELOISE DIEKER**

"Not the Mercy Me music video. Not Michael W. Smith. No. It's Words from Eloise. I'll take that because she was so sweet."

Words from Eloise was made when IMB was sending out many of their products on VHS and the YouTube craze hadn't yet taken off, LaMar recounted. Thousands of The Task videos that included the popular seg-

ment were mailed out to churches across the country.

"I heard stories that people would come up to the board and ask if they could meet her and get their picture taken with her," LaMar said. "Tourists would come through and they would want to meet Eloise."

"She was viral before viral was popular," he said.

If someone is interested in what God thinks about marriage, it does not take long to find the answer. Just open the Bible and read the opening verse, "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1), and it will only take a few minutes until you come to God creating a man and a woman and bringing them together in a union designed by Him. From those opening verses through the remainder of Scripture, marriage will remain the same from the heart of God. Recently there has been a media blitz campaign across Mississippi seeking to reeducate us in new forms of marriage. It has been a well-funded, highly publicized effort to help us understand that this is a new day and there are new ways, but most of all, it would lead us away from the biblical truth of what God intended for His race.

Why was Mississippi targeted? There are multiplicities of reasons, two of which stand out above all others. The first one is because we in Mississippi hold strongly to biblical values and anything that takes away from them, we are slow to embrace. The other thing is that surveys indicate that people in Mississippi hold to the traditional biblical view of marriage more than any other state in the nation. That is something that we neither need to be ashamed of or apologetic of, but what should we do and what must we do when it comes to understanding and trying to relate to old ideas, repackaged and pushed in human rights clothing?

We must begin with a description of marriage. In the creative work of our great God, He formed the world and everything therein; it was good. Then God created a man and woman and He brought them together. To think that first man and that first woman were united by God in marriage and the Lord said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:24). That oneness was all encompassing so that they would have love and care, support and encouragement for one another, so that they could live even as the Scripture describes, "Two are better than one" (Eccles. 4:9) in an environment to bless one another. Beyond that was the blessing of the perpetuation of the race itself. At the outset, God recognized the wonder and



## God's Plan for Marriage

the goodness of the marriage relationship and the theme of that blessing flows all the way through Scripture.

If that was the plan of God, it is impossible not to see and recognize the ongoing turbulence that comes in our world because of the disruption of marriage. Marriage was presented in Scripture in idealistic forms but also recognized the practicality of people being sinners. So marriage again and again has experienced attack and disruption sometimes because of others, but more often because of our own sinful desires. In the garden a beautiful couple in a perfect environment desired to have what God did not design for them and when they took of the tree their lives and their relationships were disrupted. They were fearful, non-supportive, accusatory, guilty. The disruption came and still does because of insufficiencies in our understanding and care of one another. Some disruptions come because of extramarital affairs. While making commitments to each other, it is not unusual for a marriage to be harmed and even destroyed because a man or a woman becomes involved in a relationship that is outside of marriage and suddenly the trust relationship in every area of the commitment becomes suspect.

Sometimes the biblical pattern is affected or disrupted because of unintended relationships. Throughout history and even in Scripture, the reality of some people stepping away from the plan and design of God to seek same-sex partners has been recorded. In Romans, Chap-

ter 1, the apostle Paul writes about this wrong and indicates that it not only leads someone away from God's plan, it leads them away from God. When you look at the various disruptions in marriage, you can only come to the conclusion that all of them are harmful. What should we do?

One, we need to reaffirm that we believe in the perfect plan of God concerning marriage. Though we may not be perfect, and certainly we like everyone else have sinned, God's plan is the perfect design. That means that we should be people who seek to be the best, God-guided mate that our husband or wife could ever have. A high standard? Absolutely. That means also that before we clamor too much about the wrongness of same-sex relationships being called marriage, we need to tend to the wrongness of anything we participate in that brings destruction to the plan of God.

Second, we must be adamant to declare that like everyone else, we too have sinned and come short of the glory of God. When you gather on Sunday morning to worship the living God, it is always healthy to recognize that everyone there, saints and sinners alike, are in fact all sinners and some have just been touched and transformed by the grace of God. Recently I was in a church preaching on Sunday morning and was amazed to hear the stories of the people who were there.

One lady who had come to know the living Lord in the environment of a caring church had escaped a living relation-

ship that she knew was wrong, unhealthy and unhelpful to her, but she felt there was no way out. Though her companion would not attend church, she came to church and met the Jesus that can break the chains and give new life.

I visited with a young man who wanted to talk to me about how God leads people to be in ministry and then he explained to me that it would be impossible for him to ever be used of God because he had been in prison. For two years he had been out of his prison garb and he had come to this church, invited by one of the men, and there he had met Jesus. Still struggling after two years of freedom from prison and freedom in the Lord, he struggled with how God could use somebody like him, but clearly, the Lord was using him. That is the ongoing story of the church and our wonderful Savior.

A final word of declaration is that we believe and affirm that God loves all of us and regardless of where we've been, what we've done or the mess that we've made of the plan that He has for us, He still cares. There is good news from heaven that Jesus Christ can come and save from the depths of our sin to the uttermost of His love and no one is to be excluded from the transforming grace of God in Christ Jesus. A friend of mine described his condition before he came to know the Lord. He said that he was so sorry and so far away from God he didn't even know if they would let him in the door when he came to church, but he was hurting so bad that he thought he would give it a try. He came and came back and each time he saw the wonder of God at work in people and heard the message of Jesus that could make a difference in his life. Since he had tried everything else and nothing worked, he wanted to trust Jesus and he did and Jesus saved him. He still refers to himself as a notorious sinner because a lot of people knew him in his notorious days, but now he is a gift of grace, saved by the power of Jesus.

So we anchor our lives, our eternity, and our marriages to the God who said, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). We will follow Him.

The author can be contacted at [directions@mbcb.org](mailto:directions@mbcb.org).

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Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John 11:26

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# Panel: DR works disasters on deeper level

**ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)** — Whether it's a tornado in Oklahoma, a wildfire in Washington or a hurricane in New York, disaster survivors need more than assistance with rebuilding their homes when tragedy strikes. They need help rebuilding their lives. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief is committed to providing help, healing and hope to disaster survivors across North America.

Many people are aware of what SBDR does in response to these types of tragedies, however many people may not realize how SBDR works on a deeper level. Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, addressed that issue as he hosted a disaster relief panel discussion Nov. 20 as part of NAMB's monthly staff "boot camp" to give insight into the scope of SBDR.

"Often we are very grateful for what Disaster Relief provides," Ezell said. "But that's on a 30,000 foot level, and we never really go below that to see how it works."

The purpose of the panel discussion was to highlight how local churches, associations, state conventions and NAMB work together to execute different SBDR efforts in the United States and Canada. Representatives from three of these groups participated in the discussion.

The panel included Phillip Harrington, senior pastor of First Church, Live Oak, Fla., Jack Noble, disaster relief director for the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV), and Fritz Wilson, executive director of NAMB disaster relief.

Harrington first participated in disaster relief efforts in 1992 after Hurricane Andrew struck Florida. His pastor challenged several church members to respond to the needs of the hurri-

cane survivors. Harrington took the initiative to continue working with SBDR by encouraging members of FBC Live Oak to get involved as well.

"Several years ago we had a training session that we hosted and Fritz led where about 400 people showed up from around the state, many of them from our own church. They all received training," said Harrington, who has pastored at FBC Live Oak for nine years. He said since that training they have viewed disaster relief opportunities around them as a tool to catapult them into further participation with SBDR.

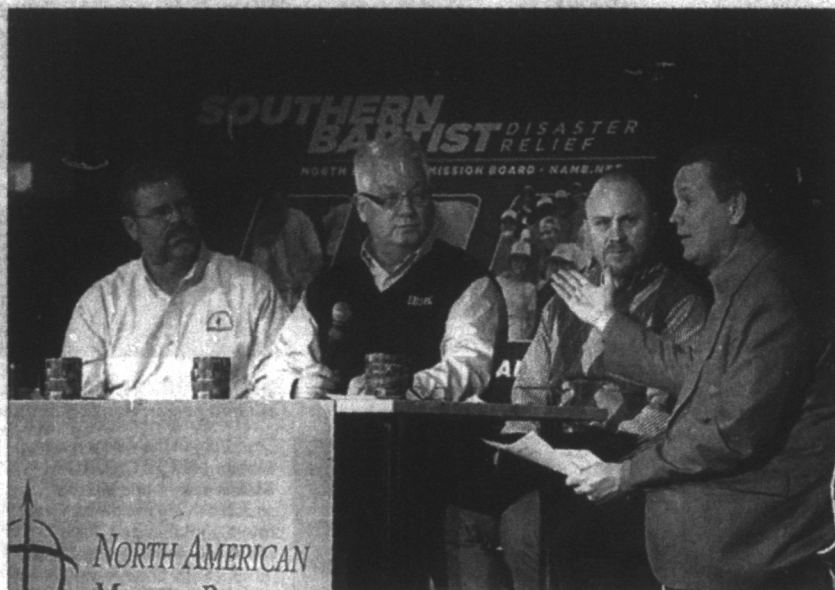
Noble said through the years he has worked with the SBCV to help equip churches in Virginia to train teams that can respond to disasters.

"We introduce churches to a concept called Ready Church. It helps them engage in their Jerusalem first ... and encourages them to start thinking about how they can minister to the crisis needs in their community, and then we network them to national and international events," Noble said.

While churches and state conventions concentrate on these local needs, the disaster relief team at NAMB coordinates efforts from a national level.

"NAMB is like an air traffic controller," Wilson said. "We don't fly the planes per se, but we help direct and make sure everything gets to where it needs to be in order to be strategic and focused."

NAMB also works on a national level with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army to develop working relationships with these partnering agencies. During the panel discussion, Ezell pointed how



**DIGGING DEEPER** — Kevin Ezell, (right) president of the North American Mission Board, addressed how local churches, associations, state conventions and NAMB work together to minister on a deeper level through disaster relief efforts during a panel discussion Nov. 20. The panel also included (from left) Fritz Wilson, executive director of NAMB Disaster Relief, Jack Noble, Disaster Relief director for the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and Phillip Harrington, senior pastor of First Church, Live Oak, Fla. (NAMB photo by Susan Whitley)

Southern Baptists stand out from these organizations by focusing on something bigger than just physically helping disaster survivors.

"We have to connect the 'help' with the 'hope' of Christ, because that is why we are different than other agencies," Ezell said.

Keeping this mission in mind, Harrington explained how disaster relief work opens up opportunities to share the Gospel with the people affected by tragedies.

"As much as we want to help the lady that has a tree on her

house, we also want her to understand that there is healing beyond just the house," Harrington said. "One of our volunteers said the greatest opportunity was not being able to take the limb off her house, but being able to sit on the porch with the lady afterwards with tears in her eyes and her ask why we're doing this, and then being able to tell her about Christ."

Wilson pointed out how SBDR starts with the financial help from Southern Baptist churches across the country. Through their giving through the Cooperative Program,

SBDR can fill disaster relief positions on the state and national level, as well as buy the necessary equipment and resources to be able to respond to disasters.

"The thing that we are really trying to get across is that for every disaster, SBDR is there every time just like Red Cross and The Salvation Army and other groups," Wilson said. "If Southern Baptists can give through Southern Baptist circles, we can do more for the Lord than anyone in disaster response."

Learn more about SBDR at [www.baptistrelief.org](http://www.baptistrelief.org).

## Ellis first black president of Tenn. convention

**BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (BP)** — Tennessee Baptists have elected the first African American president in the convention's history — Memphis pastor Michael C. Ellis.

Ellis, pastor of Impact Church, ran unopposed and was elected unanimously by the 958 registered messengers during the TBC annual meeting, Nov. 11-12 at Brentwood Church. Ellis served as vice president of the state convention in 2012.

Messengers also adopted a report from the Vision 2021 Transition Team that moves the convention forward in its aim to reach a 50/50 percent distribution of Cooperative Program funds with

the Southern Baptist Convention by 2018-19.

Ellis was nominated by a former TBC president, Fred Shackelford, who said he was "incredibly excited that we have this opportunity to do this long-overdue historic thing, but can I be honest with you?" Shackelford, pastor of Ellendale Church in Bartlett, then noted, "I don't care what color Michael's skin is. He has what it takes to lead this convention well. He's faithful to the Word, he loves the Lord Jesus and he loves his church."

In addition to serving as vice president, Ellis has served on the convention's Committee on

Committees and "has proven himself as an excellent leader in our state," Shackelford noted. Ellis' church in inner-city Memphis gives 7.2 percent of its undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program.

Ellis described his election as "another opportunity to serve" and said his status as the convention's first African American pastor is not particularly noteworthy.

"I just happen to be an African American," Ellis said, but acknowledged that his election is good for the convention.

"Race doesn't matter," he said. "That's what I love about our convention."

Randy C. Davis, TBC executive director-treasurer, called Ellis' election "a monumental

moment" in the history of the state convention.

"It's not the color of his skin that matters. It's the content of his heart," Davis affirmed, paraphrasing a sentence from Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech. Davis added that Ellis "has done an incredible work in the heart of Memphis."

Ellis founded Impact Church with 20 members in 2006 in his home as an outreach of Impact Ministries of Bellevue Church and has served Memphis' economically depressed Frayser section.

Impact Church has been a leader in baptisms among Tennessee Baptists, growing to 600 in Sunday worship within four years of its founding and becoming a leader in CP giving among majority

African American congregations in the state, according to reports.

Ellis earlier served 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring in 2001 as a Navy Chief. Among his commendations was 1996 U.S. Navy Shore Sailor of the Year. SBC LIFE, the journal of the SBC Executive Committee, published this feature on Ellis in 2010.

Tennessee joins at least 22 other state conventions that have elected African American or other non-Anglos to their presidencies, including among others the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the Florida Baptist Convention.



ELLIS

## Just for the Record



**UNION CHURCH, RANKIN ASSOCIATION**, licensed Jonathan Burnham to the gospel ministry Nov. 16. Shown are transitional pastor Alvin Doyle, Burnham, and his father Charles Ray Burnham.



**DIXIE CHURCH, HATTIESBURG**, held a Dad and Daughter night Nov. 8. Neil Harvison, student pastor; Ron McLain, senior pastor.



Members of the Women on Mission, **FIRST CHURCH, SUMRALL**, made bibs for assisted living residents. Front row: Sue Babington, Faye Miller, Lib Sumrall, Mary Lee Immon, Sally Lowery, and Pansy Jager; back: Mary Ball and Joy Conerly.



**LIBERTY HILL CHURCH, POPE**, recognized pastor Derrick Simmons for pastor appreciation. Shown are Simmons and deacon Chad Williams.



**PARKWAY CHURCH, HOUSTON**, ordained Jeremy Voyles as deacon Oct. 26. Shown are pastor Randy Rinehart, Voyles, and Audrey Voyles.



**FIRST CHURCH, CARRIERE**, honored pastor William Gary Smith for 50 years of service with special music and presentations by guest speakers Oct. 26. Shown are AMD Carl Myers, Smith, his wife Bobbie, and Rick Blythe.



**CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, youth had a fall party at the home of Greg and Shirley Allen, with games, food, bonfire, devotion, and hayride. Jenny and Jason Leggett, youth ministers; Hal Hatten, pastor.



**CENTER HILL CHURCH, MONROE COUNTY**, hosted Russell Mord, pastor of Sturgis Church, and Julia Daniels, who shared about their mission trip to Thailand at the Young at Heart meeting on November 3. Terry Edwards, pastor. Shown are Russell Mord, Sweetin, Julia Daniels, Faye Honeycutt, Donna Roberts, Doris Holman, Ellen Uithoven, Monica Blanton, and Edwards.



## Just for the Record




**CEDAR GROVE CHURCH, COLUMBIA**, held a baby dedication Nov. 9. Shown are Jessi & Joey Wilson with son, Talon, and Katie & Ben Ball with son, Patrick.



**SHELTON CHURCH, MOSELLE**, ordained Jared Brogan as deacon Nov. 2. Shown are Tracy Brogan, Brogan, and pastor Charles Brady.



**HIGHLAND CHURCH, CRYSTAL SPRINGS**, recognized their RA's.



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The mission organizations of **LEESBURG CHURCH, MORTON**, collected canned food for World Hunger.

### In other Church News:

➤ **Holly Springs Church, Holly Springs**, will present its Hanging of the Green program Nov. 30, 10 a.m. The program will feature solos, congregational singing, narrations of symbols used, monologues, and creative movement by the youth.

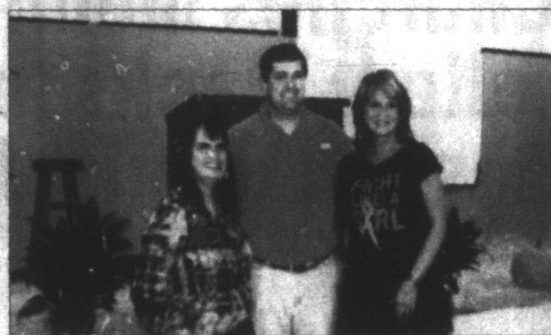
➤ **High Hill Church, Ne-shoba County**, will have a 5th Sunday night singing Nov. 30, 6 p.m., featuring Stubborn Love. Don Cook, pastor; Mike Barker, music leader.

➤ **First Church, Inverness**, with other area churches, will host Follow the Star, a walking tour of the Christmas story, Dec. 6 - 7, 6 p.m.

➤ **Algoma Church, Algoma**, will host its 23rd annual drive-thru Nativity Dec. 5 - 6, 6 - 9 p.m. The Nativity consists of five well-known scenes portraying the birth of Jesus. Free.

➤ **Escatawpa Church, Escatawpa**, is hosting the Florida Boys and Dixie Echoes in concert Nov. 29, 6 p.m., at the Joppa Shrine Center, Biloxi. Tickets, \$10. For information, call (228) 219-5759.

➤ **Improve Church, Columbia**, is hosting its annual Scenes of Christ, a walk-thru of events that changed the world, Nov. 30 and Dec. 6 - 7, 6 - 8 p.m.



**LIBERTY HILL CHURCH, POPE**, hosted a ladies' conference. Shown are pastor Derrick Simmons, Linda Oliver, and Jamie Womack.



**FIRST CHURCH OF GLENDALE, HATTIESBURG**, held a deacon ordination Nov. 9. Shown are pastor Jimmy Hill, Marty Ward, Jill Ward, and deacon chairman Tommy MacDermott.



**CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, held a Staff Appreciation Service Oct. 26 after the morning service. Each staff member was given a gift in appreciation. Shown are Danny Creel, Hal Hatten, Katie Bowman, Jenny Leggett, and Jason Leggett.



**SPRING HILL CHURCH, WATERFORD**, honored pastor John Parker and his wife Janet with a reception Oct. 25 for Pastor Appreciation Day. He was presented many items of appreciation from the church and Sunday School classes during the morning service.

# Churches mobilize fellow blacks to commit to missions

**EDITOR'S NOTES:** This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Nov. 30-Dec. 7 with the theme of "One Sacred Effort — Find your place in God's story" from Matthew 28:19-20 (HCSB). The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions in tandem with Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches support approximately 4,800 international missionaries in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. Gifts to the Lottie Moon offering are received through local Southern Baptist churches or online [atimb.org/offering](http://atimb.org/offering), where there are resources to promote the offering. This year's goal is \$175 million.

**NORTH GARLAND, Texas (BP)** — Dozens of missionary families gathered for a meeting in South Africa, but missions volunteer Jacquie Collins didn't see any African American families among them. That struck the heart of Collins, an African American, because she hadn't considered going overseas herself until a few years ago. "I never personalized it. I never thought that it was applicable to me," said Collins, a member of North Garland Baptist Fellowship, a predominantly African American congregation in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Collins joined the missions team from the North Garland congregation to lead activities for the children of missionaries serving in Africa while the parents met together. This overseas missions experience gave the North Garland team a different view of missions and their role in it — personally and as African Americans.

African Americans are underrepresented on the missions field, Collins realized. Though she did not encounter any African American missionaries at the meeting in Africa in 2012, currently there are six African American couples serving in sub-Saharan Africa through IMB. They are among the 28 African American Southern Baptists serving internationally as full-time missionaries. But that's less than 1 percent of IMB missionaries, though African Americans consist of an estimated 6 percent of Southern Baptists, said Keith Jefferson, IMB's African American missionary church strategist.

While commonalities like shared ethnicity can open doors to sharing the Gospel, "African Americans can serve God all around the world, not just in places that have people of African origin," Jefferson said. "It's not optional. ... It is an obligation; it is a commandment, and no child of God can get around the Great Commission that Jesus gave us — preaching the Gospel to all peoples."

It wasn't just Collins who felt like God had lit a fire inside her to tell others, near and far, about Him after experiencing overseas missions. North Garland pastor Tony Mathews says he had "his world rocked" by talking with the missionaries in Africa and hearing the opportunities and challenges of reaching people groups with the Gospel.

Mathews said he feels called to encourage other pastors and church leaders to "step up" their commitment to missions and make it a personal commitment as well as a corporate one.

■ Set a budget at home and in church designated for missions, Mathews counsels, no matter how small the amount may be at first. "If you put \$5, \$10, \$100 into the budget [for missions], that is almost a guarantee that you will begin to support missions in a larger way," he said.

"We're not where we want to be with the Lottie Moon offering," Mathews said of his congregation, "but now that I know and now that we see that we can have a direct impact in addition to the Cooperative Program dollars, we want to step it up."

"I just want to encourage leaders and pastors who are giving a little bit to look at the CP dollars, look at the Lottie Moon offering and know that God is using these dollars and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering without a doubt to make a direct impact into lives of people."

■ Talk about missions, not only in the general sense of every Christian's Great Commission call to it but also in a personal way born out of individual experience — share this message in the pulpit and in groups of all ages. Mathews encourages pastors and other church leaders to regularly participate in missions trips and embark on missions partnerships with missionaries.

Barry Calhoun, North Garland's director of missions, also serves as director of mobilization and fellowships for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. He encourages churches, particularly those with bivocational pastors, to join together on missions partnerships.

North Garland Baptist Fellowship has participated in a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention partnership with a Southern Baptist couple serving in South Asia. In addition, North Garland has joined Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in adopting the Antandroy people of Madagascar, and also has begun encouraging area African American churches to partner with an IMB missionary couple to reach Afro-Ecuadorians. South America can be a less expensive air travel destination than places farther away for churches beginning their involvement in international missions, Calhoun says.

Billy Bell, pastor of New Creation Bible Church in Dallas, has traveled with Mathews and a group of area African American pastors on missions trips to Ecuador twice. He and Mathews bonded over the need to recruit other African American pastors to go overseas when Mathews was leading a break-out session at the Black Church Leadership & Family Conference at LifeWay's Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina.

Bell, also a church-planting consultant for Dallas Baptist Association, and Mathews organized a local conference for African American pastors. Of the 88 participants, more than 50 of them were pastors. A group of them traveled to Ecuador this fall with Bell and Mathews. For many of them, this was their first missions trip overseas.

The key to getting a church involved in missions is getting that pastor involved in missions, Bell says. Bell began to go on missions trips in 2006 after 12 years as a pastor. "When I came back, I was changed," he said. "I began to see how God works glob-



**TONY MATHEWS**

"What I say to the African American churches is God has called 'us' to go and us meaning the body of Christ, which makes up all ethnicities ... And so therefore we should be engaged in doing whatever God has called us to do."

**Billy Bell**

**pastor of New Creation Bible Church in Dallas**

ally and not just locally."

"I mean, you can't lead where you don't go, OK, and people can't catch what you have [a vision for missions involvement] if you don't have anything to catch."

"What I say to the African American churches is God has called 'us' to go and us meaning the body of Christ, which makes up all ethnicities ... And so therefore we should be engaged in doing whatever God has called us to do."

■ Instill a heart for missions within congregations, especially within young people.

"Little kids are like sponges, and they're watching their pastors, they're watching their church leaders," Mathews said. "And when we can instill the importance of missions and global missions into the minds of our church members, it becomes a part of the DNA of the church."

Mathews' daughter, Ryann, went on her first missions trip this year at age 22. The trip to South Asia was part of North Garland's continued ministry with a national believer there, as well as a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention partnership with a Southern Baptist couple serving in South Asia.

"The change that I saw in my dad in regards to missions and how it affected me is really just showing me that there's just a whole other world out there," Ryann said.

"I think that different things may hinder young African Americans going on missions trips ... I think a lot of that has to do with fear, but I think some of the frustrations are (the financial expense) and just feeling as though God can't use them."

"But I think the Lord's raising up different African Americans, like my dad and others, to just get up and go and encourage other African Americans to go because they see, like wow, there's a black person who's going to (South Asia), there's a black person who's going to South Africa to share the

Gospel, I can do that, too. So I think if we saw more blacks who we can relate to doing that, then I think that would encourage other African Americans to go."

■ Include missions as part of altar calls, and explain what being called to missions means.

"If we expect people to respond to the call, we have to put the call out there for them to grasp," Mathews said, as part of helping people overcome the fear of the unknown.

Mathews has been advising Caleb Cummings, age 13, as he explores missions.

"We've sat down a couple of times when I was really in that deep time with the Lord about what He wants for my life," Cummings said. "We just talked about how if the Lord wants you to do something, then He's going to lay opportunities and options in front of you. Pastor Tony would just say, 'Let the Lord lead.'"

"When the pastor first went on a mission trip, which happened to be with my mom, it really just changed both of their mindsets. I could see ... how the pastor's been really focused on missions ... He's added more funds to the missions ministry. I can really see that through the mission trip, it kind of changed his perspective on what missions actually is and how it can affect so much more than just donating, how we can actually do the act of missions, too."

■ Encourage other pastors and church leaders to embrace missions as not only a good option but a great necessity. Don't tell people what they aren't doing, Mathews counseled, tell people what greater things they could be doing for God's kingdom.

"My approach with pastors in general but African American pastors specifically is to come alongside them in a workshop setting or one-on-one and say, 'You know what, having a budget for missions is great ... spending your funds overseas is greater. To sit in the congregation and to hear a mission report from one of the members who has gone on a mission trip is great, but to come back as an African American pastor or any pastor and actually give a mission report is greater.'"

■ Connect with those currently on the missions field.

"One advantage with partnering with IMB is that they already are connected globally," Mathews said. "Being able to have an outlet or an agency that can give us information on African American missionaries who are around the world is priceless."

"When that [African American missionary] couple comes home (to visit), churches could have that couple at the church to speak about what's going on in the mission field."



# Pastors experience God's timing in Ecuador

**LAGARTO, Ecuador (BP)**—Tony Mathews was on a mission. He wanted to find the man he had led to Christ a couple of days earlier.

Mathews, pastor of North Garland Baptist Fellowship in Garland, Texas, had met Wiston while walking through the small town of Lagarto on the Ecuadorian coast with a handful of fellow African American pastors and church members from the Dallas area.

The pastors' daily strolls through town had started earlier in the week, Aug. 18, 2014, as a way to acclimate the group to the town. IMB missionaries Johnny and Donna Maust had identified Lagarto for the Dallas Baptist churches to consider collectively adopting to plant a church there.

When Mathews shared why the group was there, Wiston told the pastor he had been attending the church in his nearby village but had yet to place his faith in Christ. That changed when Mathews asked Wiston if he'd like to take that step. Circled by the pastors, Wiston prayed to receive Christ.

He then asked Mathews for some Christian literature to read, but in the rush to gather the group for the walk through town, Mathews had forgotten to put the

Spanish-language material into his backpack.

Mathews promised to look for Wiston on the town's main street the following afternoon to give him the literature to help him start his Christian walk. But early the next day, Wiston found Mathews first. Caught by surprise, Mathews hadn't yet stuck the material in his bag.

On day three of the pastors' walks through town, Mathews was determined to complete the task, pleased that IMB missionary Johnny Maust's intention all along had been for the pastors to reconnect each day with the people they met. This time, the missionary accompanied the group in order to meet the new believer and to arrange to follow up with him after the team left at the end of the week.

"That third day when we walked down the main street with Johnny, lo and behold, there was Wiston," Mathews said. "When we gave him the literature, he hugged us. It was so moving and touching. Then, we connected him with Johnny so he could help him in discipleship and growth—he wants a Bible study."

That wasn't the end of the providential connections. In this region of 600,000 people,

there are only a handful of Baptist churches, one located rurally in another town and the rest in the city of Esmeraldas almost an hour away.

As Johnny spoke with Wiston, the missionary learned the church Wiston had been attending was the one rural Baptist church in the area.

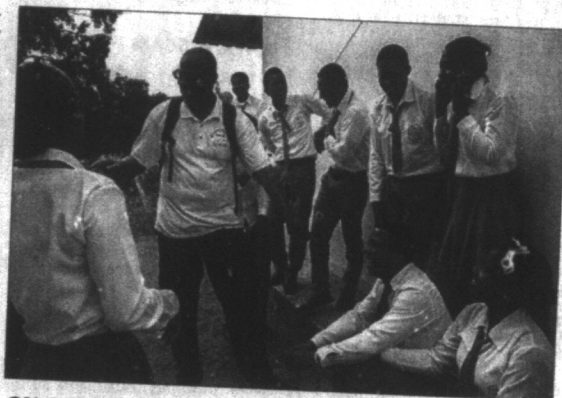
It was in the same village the Dallas pastors had visited earlier in the week as an example of what to be praying for—for a similar body of believers to form in Lagarto.

Johnny plans to reconnect Wiston with the rural Baptist pastor, as well as invite the man to a home Bible study in the works in Lagarto.

"That was worth the trip right there!" Mathews said.

For many of the visiting group who'd never been on a missions trip before, seeing this profession of faith happen right before their eyes was confirmation of God drawing them to this town to plant a church.

"When you see the need, the Lord calls you," said Timothy Wilbert, pastor of Bible Way Community Church in Irving, Texas. "Now is the time. We can get so busy, but we need to put all of that energy to work on



**ON A MISSION**—Tony Mathews, pastor of North Garland Baptist Fellowship in Garland, Texas, gets to know some of the teens attending the local high school in Lagarto, Ecuador.

the missions field. We need to broaden our vision."

The pastors realize it won't always be that easy to lead people to Christ in an area steeped in drug trafficking, witchcraft and teen pregnancy.

But their trip motto has been, "It's time for a change," not only in this community and in the hearts of its people but in the level of missions involvement of African American Southern Baptist churches.

"I've been preaching for 24 years, and you can always have your perspective changed," said Bill Toney, pastor of New Life Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. "The need I see here is motivating. I didn't know... I see so clearly now that we need more people on the missions field."

Robert Shepherd, pastor of Restoration Community Fellowship in Garland, Texas, said, "Sometimes you just have to see it... to see what missions really is."

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## IMMIGRATION

cont. from p. 1

because of his support for immigrants and reform that he believes Obama's use of executive authority is "the wrong way to go."

"On more than one occasion, I asked President Obama not to turn immigration reform into a red state/blue state issue," said Moore, who has been in two oval office meetings with the president on immigration reform. "People across the political spectrum support fixing this system, and it shouldn't be

a partisan wedge issue. I also asked him not to act unilaterally, but to work for consensus through the legislative process."

In his 15-minute speech Nov. 20, Obama defended his decision to act without congressional approval as a constitutional exercise of the president's authority. At the same time, he acknowledged he continues "to believe that the best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass the kind of common sense law" approved by the Senate. Until then, he has authority to take steps "that will help make our immigration system more fair and more just," the president said.

There is widespread agreement that America's immigration system is badly damaged. The system and its enforcement have resulted in an estimated 11 to 12 million undocumented immigrants living illegally in the United States.

Moore admitted he is frustrated with the House's failure to pass immigration reform. The Nov. 4 election gave the Republicans a majority in the Senate and control of both chambers, however. Based on this "new reality" in Washington, Republicans should be given the opportunity to fulfill their assurances that they want to work with the White House, Moore said.

"My hope is that the Republicans in Congress will not allow the President's actions here to be a pretext for re-

maining in the rut of the status quo," Moore said. "Too many people are harmed by this broken system, many of them our brothers and sisters in Christ. The lives of immigrant families, made in the image of God, are too important for political gamesmanship."

Republicans in Congress objected to Obama's actions and promised they would act.

"With this action, the president has chosen to deliberately sabotage any chance of enacting bipartisan reforms that he claims to seek. And, as I told the president yesterday, he's damaging the presidency itself," Speaker of the House John Boehner said Friday (Nov. 21).

The House "will not stand idle as the president undermines the rule of law in our country and places lives at risk" but will work to guard the Constitution, he said.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said the correct way to reform immigration "is to first bring illegal immigration under control by securing the borders and enforcing the laws, then modernizing our legal immigration system. After we do these things, we will eventually have to deal with those here illegally in a reasonable but responsible way. Obama's actions now make all of this harder and are unfair to people in our immigration system who are doing things the right way."

The ERLC has said last year's Senate-approved bill needs re-

pair. House committees have approved bills dealing with such matters as strengthening border and national security, providing visas for guest workers and requiring employers to use the E-Verify system to check employees' eligibility. The full House has yet to act on those measures, however.

The most divisive of Obama's Nov. 20 actions is his policy change to enable undocumented immigrants to remain in the United States without fear of deportation in three-year increments. This order would apply to illegal immigrants who have been in the country for more than five years and are parents of either U.S. citizens or "lawful permanent residents." Those who qualify must register, pass criminal and national security background checks, and pay taxes, according to the White House.

This action, the president said, does not cover undocumented immigrants who have entered the country recently or will in the future. It also does not provide citizenship, permanent status or the benefits received by citizens.

His actions do not constitute amnesty, Obama said. "Amnesty is the immigration system we have today—millions of people who live here without paying their taxes or playing by the rules while politicians use the issue to scare people and whip up votes at election time," he said.

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## STRATEGY

cont. from p.1

simplifying structure and solidifying leadership.

"We're working and pleading for God to raise up multitudes of workers," Platt said. "And when He does — and I believe He's doing it now — we don't want to have a small funnel that people have to squeeze through to be involved with IMB in getting the Gospel to the nations."

Instead, Platt said, "we want to simplify our structure to set the sails for the wind of God to blow His people to the world."

As a result, Platt brought three personnel recommendations to IMB trustees — two requiring a vote — describing the moves as "high-level, 40,000-foot decisions" designed to "set the stage" for subsequent decisions in the days to come.

First, IMB trustees approved Sebastian Traeger, an innovator and entrepreneur based in Washington, D.C., to serve as the agency's executive vice president. Traeger, 40, is an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and author of the book, "The Gospel at Work." He will replace Clyde Meador, 69, who has served in the role since July 2003. Meador will continue to serve on the IMB leadership team as executive advisor to the president.

Trustees also voted to approve Zane Pratt, 57, as vice president for global training. Pratt, who currently serves with IMB as theological education strategist for Asia, has 21 years of IMB missions' experience. From 2011-13, Pratt also served as dean and as-

sociate professor of Christian missions at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

### Proven leaders

Traeger, who earned a bachelor's degree in politics from Princeton University, brings a wide variety of skills and experience to the position of executive vice president, including ministry awareness, proven leadership ability, organizational acumen, financial competence and strategic experience, Platt told trustees.

As an entrepreneur, business professional and management consultant, Traeger has co-founded, built and sold several companies, including Village Phone, which launched mobile services in rural developing communities in El Salvador; Christianity.com, a self-publishing platform for Christian organizations; Razoo.com, a crowd-funding site that leverages small acts of charity to support a variety of causes; and Five Street, Inc., which provides lead management software to the residential real estate industry.

In addition, Platt said, Traeger "stands on strong biblical, theological foundations that inform a healthy understanding of the local church, global mission and every Christian's involvement in both."

Traeger, who accepted Christ as his personal Savior as a 6-year-old boy, also credits his Princeton involvement in Campus Crusade for Christ and Athletes in Action as significant milestones in his spiritual development. Since 1996, he has been a member of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., where he

"I want to make sure that everything we are and everything we do is grounded in the rock solid foundations of God's Word. I want God's Word to drive what we believe and how we operate, the message we proclaim and the methods we use to proclaim it."

David Platt  
IMB President

currently serves as a Sunday School teacher and elder. He and his wife Nikki have three children, ages 6, 5 and 3.

"I am honored and privileged to be asked to serve in this role," Traeger said. "It's amazing how God has providentially given me the capabilities and the experiences to do this work."

Specifically, Traeger said he believes his experience with leading innovation and his focus on "doing all things with excellence as unto the Lord" will prove helpful as Platt seeks to bring new models to the 169-year-old organization.

"As David starts to lead the organization with a vision for raising up more missionaries, forming more teams and incorporating more professionals, I can see how my experiences as an innovator will be helpful," Traeger said. "All my work is for the King, and I'm humbled and excited by my assignment with IMB, where I can put my hand to the plow in serving David, our staff and our workers on the field."

As Traeger steps into the role of executive vice president, Meador will move into a new position as executive advisor to the president. Meador had

discussed transitioning away from IMB to a new area of ministry upon the arrival of a new president, but Platt asked him to wait.

"I want and need the kind of biblical, missiological, experiential and personal wisdom that exists in Clyde Meador," Platt said, acknowledging that he expects Meador to speak into "every decision that is made, every change that is considered, and every step that is taken."

### Focus on training

Platt recommended creating the new position of vice president of global training to oversee IMB training efforts. Platt endorsed Pratt to fill the role based on "a unique combination of extensive missions experience alongside deep theological acumen."

"I want to make sure that everything we are and everything we do is grounded in the rock solid foundations of God's Word," Platt said. "I want God's Word to drive what we believe and how we operate, the message we proclaim and the methods we use to proclaim it."

### Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



## Living Out the Faith • Hebrews 13:1-8

We have come to the end of our time in Hebrews. It has been a great privilege to write for the Record and for the final issue I have asked my associate pastor of students, Brad Wright, to co-author with me. Brad and I have served together for three years, he is a faithful teacher of the Word and is committed to the equipping NOT entertaining the saints.

In the following eight verses the writer admonishes us in how the members of this new community should act as we are now in the church of Jesus Christ that is "an unshakable kingdom."

### Show Hospitality (1-3)

The basis for everything that follows, is "brotherly love" that is found in Christ. John 13:35, "35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." One of the ways this love will be demonstrated is by kindness to strangers, prisoners and the mistreated. These are professing believers in the "new family" that we may not personally know that are in need. We are to provide for our brothers and sisters an overnight stay, or a personal visit while "in chains" for the gospel or just being mistreated. Scripture is clear that when we show hospitality and care for those that are going through hardships, we show Christ's love.

The author states that through

these acts of hospitality, some have entertained angelic beings who appeared in human form. Abraham had such an experience in Genesis 18 when he entertained three men in Mamre, one of whom turned out to be Yahweh himself. The other two visitors (angels) went to Sodom and were shown hospitality by Lot. (Hebrews, NAC, Allen, Logos).

### Respect Marriage (4)

This is a timely text especially considering what is happening in our state with the HRC group demanding that Mississippi legalize gay marriage.

How many times have we heard that the Bible does not speak against gay marriage? Countless. Yet the Bible is CRYSTAL clear that marriage is between one man and one woman, "one flesh." Our stand as Mississippi Baptists is the same as the author's, marriage as defined by the Bible is between one man and one woman and is to be honored and undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Therefore we as Bible believing

Christians can NEVER compromise our beliefs no matter the public/private pressure to do so. We do not hate homosexuals, we love them and we pray for them to come to repentance and faith in Christ as we all did.

### Security in God (5-6)

Obviously, the audience had similar problems to ours. What American Christian does not struggle with the love of money? What Christian does not struggle with some discontentment?

The key is to not allow it to be all consuming, which is the reason we do not need to forsake the assembly of the unshakable Kingdom.

The assembly works together through accountability to the Word of God and steering one another from the dangers of love of the world. "Verse 5-6 form a unit and prohibit material greed on the grounds of God's perennial care for those who are his. An inordinate concern for one's possessions can supplant care for those in the Christian family and foreigners." (Hebrews, NAC, Allen, Logos)

### Imitate Proven Leaders (7-8)

Finally, the author touches on one of my favorite themes in Scripture, respect for leadership. He calls us to remember and imitate their lives because of their strong commitment to the Word of God. "Their leadership authority derives from the authority of the Word. Furthermore, this designation indicates the primacy of the preaching/teaching ministry of the leaders in the local church." (Hebrews, NAC, Allen, Logos) Based on what I and others have experienced, there has been a great deterioration of the respect and honor of the office of senior pastor. Statistics since the early 80's show a historical trend of over 1,000 staff forcibly terminated each year in SBC life. The "unshakable kingdom" must have long term, Word-driven leadership. Please pray for, love, submit to and support your leadership!! They are doing a very difficult task and need your trust and loyalty, so if someone is antagonizing your leadership please step up and help put a stop to it, immediately.

Finally...remember the entire reason any of this matters...Jesus Christ is the SAME yesterday and today and forever.

Hazzard is pastor of Woodland Church, Columbus. Wright is associate pastor of students at Woodland Church, Columbus.



## Ministry in the Face of Mental Illness • 2 Corinthians 1:2-7

James had stopped taking his medication...again. Marge, his mother, shuddered as she began to see the recognizable signs. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, her son was able to live a fairly-normal life with the help of his prescription. However, at times, he'd think he really didn't need it anymore, and would put it aside. That's when the trouble would start.

Knowing she could do nothing, Marge grabbed her always-packed bag and headed to the home of a friend. James knew where she was, and before dawn the next morning, he came and slashed the friend's car tires. A neighbor, going to get his morning paper, had seen James' vehicle and described it to Marge's friend, who called the police. The young man was then incarcerated until he could get back on his medication to stabilize his behavior.

Some churches have marquees that say "All Welcome". But, really, would many churches welcome James? And schizophrenia is just one of a plethora of mental illnesses/issues (think bipolar, depression, OCD, anxiety, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder to name a few) that cause great grief to their victims, families and friends.

Churches have compassion, but members and staff often don't know how to minister to this segment of society. A recent Baptist Press article entitled "Mental Illness Remains Taboo Topic for Pastors" reveals that about

two-thirds of a polled group of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors "seldom (or never) speak to their congregation about mental illness." And, sadly, there is the often-misapplied stigma that the mentally ill just lack adequate faith.

So how can we be more empathetic and helpful? Today's lesson gives us insight. The brief passage includes praise to "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3 NIV). He "comforts us in all our troubles" (vs. 4), and we're to take that same comfort and administer it to others in need.

In the following verses, Paul describes suffering for the cause of Christ (vs. 4), and said the result of these ordeals (which, verse 8 says, were so severe, Paul and his fellow-workers "despaired of life itself") was an overflowing of God's comfort. In verses 6 and 7, the apostle pointed out that whether the ministry team suffered distress or comfort, the compassion received from God's hand and heart would sift down to benefit the readers: "As you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

Whether suffering for our faith or for other reasons, we can look to God for his comfort. Those who have endured anguish are best-suited to administer God's comfort and care to a hurting humanity, including families living with mental illness. But having the "heart to" help must be coupled with the "how-to". Church leaders need to prayerfully educate themselves. There are countless resources, both secular and faith-based. One such is NAMI (National Alliance on

Mental Illness; www.nami.org); whose website also includes NAMI FaithNet, "a network of NAMI members

and friends dedicated to promoting caring faith communities and promoting the role of faith in recovery for individuals and families affected by mental illness."

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., and his wife Kay, have long been advocates on mental illness ministry, and even more-so since their son Matthew's death by suicide last year. Kay shares two helpful resource materials: "Troubled Minds" by Amy Simpson and "Grace for the Afflicted", by Matthew

Stanford. These titles, she says, are "must-read books on basic mental illness information and the church."

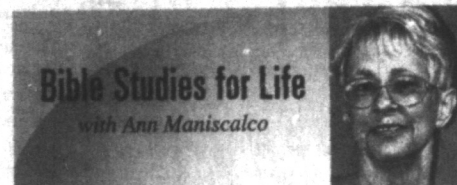
WMU (Woman's Missionary Union) is also addressing mental illness, focusing on PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Those who've experienced such things as sexual abuse, natural disasters, accidents, participation in wars, and many other traumatic life events can experience PTSD. "Drawing Near - Understanding and Supporting Those with PTSD", has been published by WMU (www.wmustore.com) to help such families.

In another Baptist Press article, writer Bob Smietana reports that Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, "hopes more churches will become open to talking about mental illness. That means taking a holistic approach that deals with spiritual, emotional and physical concerns." Counseling and medication can join hands with prayer and Bible study.

Clinton affirms, "Churches need to be biblical communities of healing."

A part of Jesus' mission was to "set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). We, empowered by His Spirit, can become the Lord's heart and hands to those in the grips of mental distress. May our congregations pray and prepare to be such avenues of grace.

Maniscalco is a member of Lemoyne Boulevard Church in Biloxi.





JIM BOB AND MICHELLE DUGGAR

## Reality show's the Duggars targeted by pro-gay petition

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — Nearly 100,000 people have signed an online petition asking the TLC network to cancel the popular reality show "19 Kids and Counting," contending that its stars, Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, use their fame "to promote discrimination, hate, and fear-mongering against gays and transgendered people."

The Duggars have 19 children and are outspoken advocates of their Christian faith as well as pro-family public policies. Their television show debuted in 2008 as "17 Kids and Counting," since which time they have had two more children. Speaking at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary last year, the Duggars said they stopped using birth control pills after the drugs caused Michelle to experience a miscarriage years ago.

The petition to cancel the Duggars' show was launched by Jim Wissick of San Jose, Calif., at the website change.org and apparently stems from the Duggars' opposition to a Fayetteville, Ark., ordinance that provides civil rights protections for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) individuals. Fayetteville's city council approved the ordinance in August, but opponents gathered enough signatures from city residents to place the ordinance before voters during a special election Dec. 9.

A counter-petition in support of the Duggars was launched Nov. 20 at LifeSiteNews.com. According to that petition, "We need to launch a counter-attack, letting TLC know that the American people stand by the Duggars and their defense of traditional family values. Rather than being extreme, the Duggars represent the majority of people in state after state who have stood up for the traditional family. The real extremists are those who are demanding that a TV network pe-

nalize America's beloved family because they support the truth about family, which they have always expressed in a loving, compassionate fashion."

Prior to the city council's approval of the ordinance, Michelle Duggar placed a robocall to northwest Arkansas residents warning, as quoted by Wissick, "The Fayetteville City Council is voting on an ordinance this Tuesday night that would allow men — yes I said men — to use women's and girls' restrooms, locker rooms, showers, sleeping areas and other areas that are designated for females only. I don't believe the citizens of Fayetteville would want males with past child predator convictions that claim they are female to have a legal right to enter private areas that are reserved for women and girls."

Duggar's words "reek of ignorance and fear mongering," Wissick wrote. "Just because someone is transgendered doesn't mean they are a child predator or a rapist."

Wissick added, "The Duggars have thrown massive amounts of money to repeal this law so business owners and land lords can evict and fire people solely over gender identity and sexual orientation! They need to be taken off the air!"

The Duggars' oldest son Josh, who is executive director of the Family Research Council's legislative group, drew criticism from Wissick for being employed by "a hate-filled, anti-gay organization."

The Duggars' Facebook page also has been the subject of criticism from gay activists, according to CBS News. Earlier this month Jim Bob and Michelle posted a photo of themselves kissing along with the caption, "God designed marriage to be a loving, dynamic relationship between a husband and wife for a lifetime. God loves marriage and it is supposed to be

full of love, joy, fun and romance. We challenge all married couples to take a happily married picture and post it here."

John Becker, of the LGBT blog The Bilerico Project, posted a photo of himself kissing his homosexual partner along with a message advocating gay marriage. The Duggars removed the photo and banned Becker from their Facebook page, CBS News reported.

On Twitter, Josh Barro, a reporter for a New York Times section called TheUpshot and an MSNBC contributor, wrote, "Anti-LGBT attitudes are terrible for people in all sorts of communities. They linger and oppress, and we need to stamp them out, ruthlessly."

Evangelical blogger Samuel James responded at the Patheos website in a blog titled "The Salem Duggar Trials," noting:

"So let's lay all the facts out as simply as possible:

- The Duggar family has a popular television program that many Americans enjoy

- The Duggar family have personal beliefs about sex and religion that are shared by a very large number of other Americans

- According to Jim Wissick and the petition signers, the Duggars' beliefs — and by extension, the beliefs of tens of millions of Americans — are evil.

- Entertainment companies like TLC have a moral duty to not give employment or platform to people whose beliefs about sex are evil.

- Therefore, TLC should behave morally and cancel the Duggars' popular show in order to avoid spreading evil beliefs among the viewing public.

"Read over that sequence carefully, and then ask yourself: Who is trying to force their beliefs on others here?"

TLC has not commented on Wissick's petition, according to the Huffington Post.

## Floyd releases ebook for prayer, revival

**SPRINGDALE, Ark. (BP)** — Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd has released a motivational tool book to help pastors and churches across the SBC engage in concerted prayer for the next great awakening in advance of the 2015 annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

Floyd announced the release of his ebook in a press conference call Nov. 19, joined by Southern Baptist editors, writers and state convention leaders. The announcement also marked the release of the annual meeting theme, "Great Awakening: Clear Agreement, Visible Union, Extraordinary Prayer," based on Romans 13:11, for the June 16-17 gathering.

During the conference call, Floyd highlighted several recommendations from his ebook: intercessory prayer for pastors on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings in advance of weekly sermons; a month of preaching on the subjects of repentance, extraordinary prayer, revival, awakening and teaching on God's word; the dedication of a full Sunday morning worship service to congregational prayer; a day of prayer and fasting in May, and attendance at the Columbus meeting.

Floyd's ebook, "Pleading with Southern Baptists To Humbly Come Together before God in Clear Agreement, Visible Union, and in Extraordinary Prayer for the Next Great Awakening and for the World to Be Reached for Christ," is available for free download at pray4awakening.com, sbc.net, RonnieFloyd.com, ibookstore.com and other sites. Additional tools and resources to promote the call to prayer are available on pray4awakening.com, including sermons from SBC pastors, encouraging pastors to learn from one another, Floyd said.

"I believe pastors need handles," he said of the ebook. "I think sometimes we operate in

generalities, like you should do this, or you should do that. But I also believe there's historical precedence set in the awakenings, of them coming to agreement about a certain thing."

"I mean for example, let's just say that a few hundred of our churches would really try their very best to have a month where they're preaching on matters like repentance, and revival and awakening and reaching the world for Christ, and fasting and those kind of matters," he said. "I mean that makes a major difference."

Southern Baptists need to be in prayer for their churches, for their pastors, Floyd said. He called for three minutes of prayer each Saturday evening and Sunday morning for the anointing of God to come upon pastors as they preach His Word.

"I think we'll have less conflict if we learn how to pray together," he said. "And we'll have a greater force of the Holy Spirit and His power in our churches if we pray regularly. And the sunrise and sunset is an image; that's all it is. It's a reminder to pray, either one or the other, when people get up or when they go to bed at night."

Floyd compiled the book in consultation with theologians and leaders across the SBC, and referenced such stalwarts as Billy Graham, Jonathan Edwards, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Jeremiah Lanphier, Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody and William Booth.

"Surely we can embrace with clear agreement that spiritual revival personally, spiritual revival in the church, and spiritual awakening in the nation are all needed so we can accelerate our pace in reaching the world for Christ," Floyd wrote in the book. "Certainly we can deny ourselves, defer our own preferences, and visibly unite in extraordinary prayer for the next Great Awakening and for the world to be reached for Christ."

